6 Traits Writing

Mini-Lessons to help students put VOICE in their writing:

* Famous Authors and Voice

If you have read a number of books by the same author, you can use these books to help your students understand voice. If you have not done this, you may want to do an author study in preparation for teaching students about voice. A list of links to lesson plans for author studies are presented at the end of this page.

To do the lesson, take out the books by the same author, read students the titles and remind them about the books, if it has been a while since you read them. Talk to the students about what you think makes this author's work special. Explain that this is what gives this author's books VOICE.

For example, I could use books by James Marshall and Harry Allard, including The Stupids, The Stupids Step Out, The Stupids Die, Miss Nelson is Missing,and The Cut-Ups. These are all books I have read previously during an author study.

After showing students the books and reading the titles I would say, "What makes all of these books special to me is that they are silly and make me laugh. I remember a part from The Stupids Die when the Stupids think they are dead because the power has gone out and it is dark in their house, and how the Stupids always sleep under their bed not on it.

"All of Marshall and Allard's books are very silly. I guess you could say they have a silly voice. When I read your writing I look for your VOICE because that is one of the things that make your writing special and interesting."

Some other ideas for using books by one author for Voice:

* + Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad Books are always about friends who help each other.
  + William Steig's characters usually encounter some strange and bizarre adventure.
  + Bill Peet always uses animals as the main characters.
* A Beginning Voice Lesson (developed by Vicki Spandel)

Tell students that you are going to play a listening game. All students will be asked to close their eyes. You will walk around and tap one of your students on the shoulder. That student is to say, "Hi, it's me!" At this point the other students open their eyes and try to figure out who was tapped by the sound of the Voice.

Play this several times. Tell students that writing can have Voice too and sometimes you can tell who wrote something because their writing has a special voice.

* Looking for Voice in Children's Literature (suggested by Susan Nixon)

As you read literature selections to students, ask them to listen for examples of Voice. Ask them to raise their hands when they think they have heard something the author has written which invites them to laugh, cry, be fearful, feel silly, etc.

As students increase the instances of Voice they can find by listening, they are ready to put Voice in their own writing. Remind them about Voice at the beginning of each writing workshop, and suggest that they see what emotion their writing can invite a reader to share.

* Looking for Voice in Student's Writing

Prepare by looking for evidence of voice in the writing of your students. Once you find a good example, make an overhead transparency of the piece of writing.

Read the piece aloud to the class while showing it on the overhead projector. Underline words and sentences that you think give the piece of writing Voice. Model this for several days or until you think students are beginning to catch on.

For a more advanced version of this, ask your students to find sentences or words in the piece that make the writing special to them, or that make the writing individual.